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**PUBLIC OPINION: THE NEGLECTED INSTRUMENT OF
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY**

BY

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Elizabeth A. Bourbeau

TITLE: Public Opinion: The Neglected Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 08 March 2001 PAGES: 36 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

In a democracy such as ours one may assume that foreign policy and national interests are determined from the 'bottom –up', by the people—but are they? Congress, not the presidency, is after all the subject of Article 1 of the Constitution of the United States. The question implicit in this theme is whether the great issues of foreign policy and the decision to employ military force can be safely entrusted to the influence of popular opinion. This question applies to the United States today as it applied to Athens in the middle of the fifth century B.C. Since the end of the Cold War the United States military has deployed with increasing frequency as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. Estimates indicate that U.S. forces have been used for unexpected contingencies about once every nine weeks and have deployed 34 times in less than eight years. During the entire 40 year period of the Cold War, the military was committed to comparable deployments just 10 times. These missions have ranged from traditional military operations in Korea, Kuwait and Taiwan, to humanitarian relief operations in Central America and peacekeeping functions in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of public opinion in the context of American democracy and its influence, if any, on the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. This paper traces the historical underpinnings of two contending schools of thought, their influence on the organization of American government and the formation of American political thought regarding the role of public opinion in U.S. foreign policy-making.

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PUBLIC OPINION: THE NEGLECTED INSTRUMENT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

When foreign affairs were ruled by autocracies or oligarchies the danger of war was in sinister purpose. When foreign affairs are ruled by democracies the danger of war will be mistaken beliefs. The world will be gainer by the change, for, while there is no human way to prevent a king from having a bad heart, there is a human way to prevent a people from having an erroneous opinion.

—Elihu Root¹

Foreign policy is the sum total of decisions and actions governing a nation's relations with other nations. The major foreign policy ingredients are national goals to be achieved and resources for achieving them. Statecraft is the art of formulating realistic goals and marshalling appropriate resources to attain them.

—Roger H. Davidson²

In his remarks to the National Press Club in 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger stated "Of all the many policies our citizens deserve—and need—to understand, none is so important as those related to the uses of military power—Under what circumstances and by what means, does a great democracy such as ours make the painful decision that the use of military force is necessary to protect our interests or to carry out our national policy?"³ Weinberger outlined six conditions appropriate for the deployment of American military forces abroad. One of those conditions was that "military force should be used as only as a last resort and when deemed vital to our national interests . They should be used only when diplomacy fails and, even then, only when the objective is clear and attracts the support of the American public and the Congress."⁴ His cabinet colleague, Secretary of State George Shultz "publicly disagreed with what would later be known as the 'Weinberger Doctrine', characterizing it then, and later in his memoirs, as an "unreasonably stringent set of preconditions that rarely if ever, could be met."⁵ According to Shultz "diplomacy not backed by strength will always be ineffectual at best, dangerous at worst and would serve as an excuse for inaction, even when vital American interests abroad were potentially threatened."⁶ "Varying interpretations of the Vietnam war, why it was lost, and the appropriate lessons to be drawn from that conflict, especially with respect to the deployment of troop abroad, continue to generate heated debate for more than three decades after the last Americans were evacuated from Saigon."⁷

Ole R. Holsti attributes the philosophical divide between Weinberger and Shultz to what many have come to refer to as the 'Vietnam Syndrome'—"the propensity to perceive and assess international undertakings through the prism of war in Southeast Asia."⁸ This division, Holsti believes, may also reflect a "more basic and venerable debate about a central issue

regarding the theory and practice of democratic government”⁹, namely: what is the proper role of public opinion in the conduct of foreign affairs? In a democracy such as ours one may assume that foreign policy and national interests are determined from the ‘bottom up’, by the people—but are they? Congress, not the presidency, is after all the subject of Article 1 of the Constitution of the United States. The question implicit in this theme is whether the great issues of foreign policy and the decision to employ military force can safely be entrusted to the influence of popular opinion. This question applies to the United States today as it applied to Athens in the middle of the fifth century B.C.

Since the end of the Cold war the U.S. military has deployed with increasing frequency as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. Estimates indicate that “U.S. military forces have been used for unexpected contingencies about once every nine weeks and have deployed 34 times in less than eight years. During the entire 40 year period of the Cold War, the military was committed to comparable deployments just 10 times.”¹⁰ These missions have ranged from traditional military operations in Korea, Kuwait and Taiwan, to humanitarian relief operations in Central America and peacekeeping functions in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. All of these deployments have been and continue to be conducted under a national security strategy based upon three core objectives: “enhancing American security; bolstering economic prosperity and; promoting democracy and human rights abroad”¹¹. According to Walter Slocombe, U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for policy under the Clinton administration, “international security is to economic interests as oxygen is to the body. In an increasingly interdependent world, our concern with other nations cannot be limited to securing our borders or even to protecting our trade. Without security and stability on a broader scale, neither our safety or our prosperity can be assured. Our armed forces play an important role by engaging with other countries to increase our security and build bridges of understanding.”¹² As outlined in *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, “sustaining our engagement over the long term will require the support of the American people and the Congress to bear the costs of defending U.S. National Interests.”¹³.

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of public opinion in the context of American democracy and its influence, if any, on the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. This paper traces the historical underpinnings of two contending schools of thought, their influence on the organization of American government and the formation of American political thought regarding the role of public opinion in foreign policy-making. Although this topic is rich with opportunity for debate, I set the justificatory arguments mostly aside in my effort to explore the following questions: Do the opinions of American citizens influence the shaping of U.S. foreign

policy? Does the president alone determine U.S. national interests and when military force is used to protect them? Have politicians and experts decided these issues without voter input? And if so, why?

THE ASSUMPTION

No American program, no plan for world order, can succeed unless it has the full support of public opinion, both at home and abroad. At home there are large areas of ignorance and prejudice about foreign affairs and abroad there are large segments of misinformation and suspicion about us. Unless we educate public opinion at home, we shall not be impelled to do the job in foreign policy that needs to be done. Unless we make ourselves understood abroad, no matter how good our intentions, we shall fail. A better informed opinion is vital to us. It will bring some light into areas of information and propaganda —areas in which light is greatly needed. It will prove of some service to the makers of our foreign policy—in the White House, in Congress, and the State Department, especially among the people—in this great task of enlightenment.

—Lester Markel¹⁴

Throughout American history, ideas about human nature, about history and about what America stands for have had a significant impact of the foreign policy decisions of our presidents. For over two and a half centuries, competing assumptions about behavior in international relations have influenced debate among theorists, reformers and U.S. policy makers. Many of these assumptions concern the nature of power within the system—whether power is concentrated among a few actors or diffused among many; whether the power is military, economic, or ideological in nature and whether it imparts a uni-polar, multi-polar or other structure to the system. Since the mid-nineteenth century two primary schools of American political thought have emerged. Reinhold Niebuhr called them “Rational Idealism” and “Historical Realism”. Historical Realism holds the longest intellectual lineage, tracing its history to Thucydides, if not earlier. Followers of the Realist school for the most part emphasize the finite limits of human nature and history. They perceive nation-states as the only real actors in the international system and consider power, and in particular military power, as the only trustworthy means by which to shape and guide state behavior. The Realist approach is derived from Biblical ethics—from St. Augustine, John Calvin, Edmund Burke, James Madison and many other classical thinkers. Their beliefs rest on the premise that perfect peace, justice, and freedom is not possible in this world, but rather exist as worthy end-states for which nations may strive. Abraham Lincoln for example, is considered by some to be the personification of a ‘humane realists’. In contrast, the Rational Idealists form a more contemporary school of intellectual thought dating to the seventeenth century—a period that coincides more or less with

the creation of the modern state system and the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648. This school "affirms the perfectibility, or at least improbability of human nature and the possibility, if not the inevitability, of progress in history. To the Idealist, the impossible ideal is achievable because it can be rationally conceived."¹⁵ They consider "balance-of-power thinking foreign in origin, amoral in nature, and the cause of endless wars. In fact, Idealists believe that ideas are more important than power, and they base their policy prescriptions on the American experience with democracy and federalism. Just as the Constitution provided a means for the American states to live in peace, so a new world order should be based upon collective security, a concept they believe can be a substitute for the balance of power."¹⁶

Rational Idealists and Historical Realists have argued the issues of foreign policy, international relations and statecraft for over twenty five centuries, yet throughout this time the question regarding the appropriate role of public opinion in foreign policy-making remains a persistent theme for debate. "Is public opinion really considered a force of 'enlightenment' — a prerequisite for democratic policy making? Or is it a source of emotional and shortsighted thinking that can only serve only to impede the effective pursuit and defense of vital national interests?"¹⁷

ETHOS OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

Tyranny of the majority offers a frightening spectacle to advocates of democracy. We could satisfy all of our conditions—the people could speak through their own participation, votes could be counted so as to satisfy political equality, the issues could be fully debated so as to satisfy deliberation. Still, the system could result in consequences that destroy the rights or the essential interests or the liberties of some portion of the population, even when the imposition of these deprivations was entirely avoidable. Tyranny of the majority delegitimizes the voice of the people.

—James S. Fishkin¹⁸

From the birth of the Republic, "the American Founders believed that they were faced with a unique problem. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in *Federalist No. 1*, 'it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country...to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.'"¹⁹ Alexander Hamilton and others expressed serious doubt about the wisdom and judgment of the general public. Concerned with the prospect of "ochlocracy," Hamilton endeavored to limit access of the public to the levers of political power. Countless others have

shared Hamilton's skepticism. Walter Lippmann, a preeminent journalist of the twentieth century believed that democracies "ultimately decay." The reason? Unrestrained public opinion. "Statesmanship and the ability to make policy," he argued, "requires wisdom, patience, discipline, deep knowledge of national and world affairs and willingness to weigh the long term consequences of an act against its immediate benefits—virtues the public lacks. Therefore, public opinion and enlightened leadership invariably collide."²⁰ Lippmann concluded, "the public was often destructively wrong at critical junctures of American history and was sufficiently powerful that politicians had no choice but to placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or manipulate their constituents."²¹ "This pandering to the masses created a morbid derangement of government, a potentially fatal 'malady' unless people realized that society remained free only so long as its leaders have sufficient latitude to exercise their judgment."²²

Opposing these skeptics, another school held the public in much higher esteem. Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend in 1816: "We both consider the people as our children. But you love them as infants whom you are afraid to trust without nurses."²³ V.O. Key, Jr., an associate of Jefferson and student of American politics agreed that democracies might decay, but was not convinced the public was entirely to blame. He suggested one "look instead to the nations leaders. Democracies decay, if they do, not because of the cupidity of the masses, but because of the stupidity and self seeking of leadership echelons. Politicians often make of the public a scapegoat for their own shortcomings. Their actions, they say, are a necessity for survival given the state of public opinion. Yet the opinion itself results from the preaching's of the influentials, of this generation and of several past generations."²⁴ The hyperbole expressed by Hamilton and Jefferson, much like Weinberger and Schultz, reflects the philosophical divide between the Realist and Idealist position concerning public opinion in the democratic process. Gabriel Almond—a twentieth century pioneer of public opinion polling and research concluded 30 years ago that: "Americans invest their intellectual and emotional energies in private pursuits, to the neglect of public policy concerns. Policy concerns that impinge directly on their daily lives may generate some interest and attention among the public, but remote international events rarely do. Consequently, foreign policy issues give rise to mass indifference, punctuated by occasional apprehension or anger in response to an international crisis."²⁵ Almond described the public mood as "essentially...unstable" and prone to "dangerous overreactions." The Realist-Idealist divide is worthy of careful consideration for it serves to shed light in our understanding of U.S. foreign policy-making, the role of public opinion in the "process" and future implications in the post-Cold War national security strategy debate.

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The Congress of the United States speaks with many tongues, not always intelligibly and often confusedly.

—Lester Markel²⁶

The term 'democratic process' suggests a process in which policy is derived as the outcome of public debate over the issues. However, the construct of democracy itself can take on a variety of forms. "Thucydides maintained that the Athenian democracy of his time, which was a direct democracy, worked only as long as it was under the lofty and powerful leadership of Pericles, and that it failed disastrously when he was succeeded as leader, by such irresponsible demagogues as Cleon and Alcibiades."²⁷ In a famous quote he wrote:

"Pericles, by his rank, ability and known integrity, was able to exercise an independent control over the masses—to lead them instead of being led by them;...he enjoyed so high a reputation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction...With his successors, it was different. More or less on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude. This, as might have been expected in a great imperial state, produced a host of blunders..."²⁸

Thucydides then went on to explain in detail how these 'blunders' brought about the downfall of Athens.

Much like Thucydides, "fear of a majority tyranny animated the American Founders in their design. Their lack of enthusiasm for popular participation was due precisely to the fear that the masses might be aroused in dangerous factions, adverse to the rights of others."²⁹ The Founders were well aware, having experienced the Shay's Rebellion in 1786, that the "masses" were capable of "dangerous passions". Although their goal was to establish a system of government that would ensure deliberation and non-tyranny, they remained wary of both political equality and public participation. "Concerned with the difficulties of controlling factions in a 'pure democracy' and the small, direct democracies of the ancients, James Madison advocated the formation of a 'republic' based on 'successive filtrations' of the public views. Famously, Madison did not embrace the term 'democracy' preferring 'republic' by which he meant a government in which the 'scheme of representation' takes place. The people's voice was to be filtered or refined by the deliberations of representatives."³⁰ As he explained in *Federalist No. 10*, " 'the delegation of the government' to elected representatives would serve to 'refine and enlarge' the public views by passing them through a chosen body of citizens. 'Because such representatives would be able to resist temporary or partial considerations', Madison argued, 'It may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of

the people, will be more than consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose.'³¹ According to Robert Goodin, "the filter can be thought of as the process of deliberation through which representatives, in face to face discussion, may come to considered judgments about public issues. The aim is for the participants to come to their conclusions after a balanced consideration of the competing arguments and on the basis of reasonably good information."³² The intent of 'successive filtration' was to "insulate the deliberative process from the immediate views of the people and to remove the process from public participation. Madison's central metaphor that representation is to refine and enlarge the public's views can be taken as meaning *refinement* in the sense of arriving at the best quality—the elite, in other words—of society.³³ The effectiveness of the 'successive filtration' process [Congress] promulgated by Madison rested, in my opinion, on two very critical assumptions. First: the representative body would remain informed on all matters concerning national policy and second: the representative body would serve as an informed "educator for the people" on matters of national policy.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The formulation of foreign policy is the function of the executive branch of the government. It is the job of the President, assisted by the State Department; he alone is authorized by the Constitution to negotiate with other governments. But the implementation of foreign policy, through the ratification of treaties, the enactment of enabling legislation and, most important of all, through the appropriations of funds, is the function of Congress.

—Cabell Phillips³⁴

The United States Constitution is an invitation to the President and to Congress to struggle for the privilege of conducting American foreign policy.

—Edwin Corwin³⁵

According to Louis J. Halle, "the first President of the American Republic, George Washington enjoyed a popular prestige in his day such as no President since. What Thucydides said of Pericles might have been said equally well of him: that by his rank, ability and known integrity [he] was able to exercise an independent control over the masses—to lead them instead of being led by them."³⁶ Washington, in the opinion of Halle, "conceived his duty to be that of exercising his own judgment in foreign policy, like a general on a battlefield, rather than that of giving effect to whatever the public opinion at the moment might be."³⁷

The French Revolution which led to the outbreak of war between France and England may be considered the “first incident of confrontation between American popular opinion, on the one hand, and President Washington’s own judgment on the other. The militant and articulate part of the public, disregarding the strategic considerations that were ‘beyond it’s understanding’, became wildly for the French cause against the English. Popular opinion demanded that the new American nation align itself with France against England. President Washington, however, deciding that the nation was in no position to become involved in this war, issued his so-called “Proclamation of Neutrality” in defiance of popular opinion.”³⁸

The theme of ‘independent [presidential] control over the masses’ in decisions concerning foreign policy, however, is not unique to Washington. From 1789 to 1900 the executive branch frequently “claimed for the president the power to initiate war and determine it’s magnitude and duration, including skirmishes with Indian tribes, the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion, actions taken against the Barbary powers, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War and the Spanish American War.”³⁹

The period of 1900 to 1945 elicited another wave of executive activism when Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft ordered American Troops, without Congressional approval, into action in the Caribbean and Central America. Woodrow Wilson, on two occasions, employed military coercion against Mexico and when World War I erupted, “Wilson resorted to unilateral decision making in foreign affairs still more. At the war’s end, he virtually ignored the wishes of Congress in negotiating the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.”⁴⁰

The outbreak of war in Europe in the autumn of 1939 created a new atmosphere of crisis in the United States. “Openly sympathizing with the Allied cause and fearing that an Axis victory would imperil U.S. security, Franklin Roosevelt sought to weaken or evade the neutrality legislation that constrained his foreign policy options—trading U.S. destroyers to Great Britain for base rights in the Caribbean, proclaiming the Western half of the North Atlantic an American defense zone, ordering U.S. naval vessels to sink German ships in that area on sight, convoying British ships, and imposing a trade embargo on Japan...were all presidential decisions accomplished without congressional authorization or even participation.”⁴¹

President Truman’s position on executive prerogative concerning U.S. foreign policy in Korea was best expressed by his following statement: “Under the President’s constitutional powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, he [the President] has the authority to send troops anywhere in the world.”⁴² “A short time later, a State Department position paper produced under the auspices of Dean Acheson expanded that theses: “Not only has the president the authority to use the Armed Forces in carrying out the broad foreign policy of the

United States and implementing treaties but it is equally clear that this authority may not be interfered with by the Congress in the exercise of powers which it has under the Constitution.”⁴³

The Johnson administration, “represented the apogee of unrestrained presidential power. Executive authority had grown inexorably for nearly three decades in a perpetual crisis atmosphere.”⁴⁴ Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., summarizes the reasons for the evolution of presidential domination in foreign policy accordingly:

“The imperial presidency was essentially the creation of foreign policy. A combination of doctrines and emotions...belief in permanent and universal crisis, fear of communism, faith in the duty and right of the United States to intervene swiftly in every part of the world...had brought about the unprecedented centralization of decisions over war and peace in the presidency. With this came an unprecedented exclusion of Congress, the press and of public opinion in general from these decisions.”⁴⁵

In his article *Global Interventionism and a New Imperial Presidency*, Ted Galen Carpenter offers the following interesting observation:

“from the founding of the republic until World War II, two definite patterns emerged with respect to executive power over foreign policy. First...both the degree of authority and the willingness to use it unilaterally expanded dramatically in times of war and when the United States has gone on interventionist binges, as it did in Latin America in the early 1900’s. Secondly...following wartime executive aggrandizement, Congress invariably reassured itself and brought the presidency to heel.”⁴⁶

PUBLIC OPINION AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TODAY

On national security matters, Americans are and have been divided on three attitudinal dimensions: whether the United States should be actively involved in world affairs; if so, whether that involvement should be largely cooperative or independent in nature; and finally—when deemed necessary—whether it should include military force. There is sound reason to believe that these proclivities have existed for some time in the collective American psyche.

—Ronald H. Hinckley⁴⁷

Polling data published in the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999 suggests the American public disagreed with many foreign policy issues of the Clinton administration. Before he summarized the findings of his survey, John E. Rielly provided the following information to bring context to the “The Mood In The United States” at the time his survey was conducted:

“At the time this survey was undertaken, the United States was enjoying its greatest economic success in decades. The stock market was at an all time high, unemployment was under five percent and the massive federal budget deficit

was replaced by an estimated fifty to one hundred billion dollar surplus. At the same time, the trade deficit in goods and commodities ballooned to the level of two hundred and fifty dollars annually—the highest ever, and the nation's savings rate sank to one of the lowest levels ever. In November 1996 President Clinton was re-elected by a decisive margin, although Congress continued to be controlled in both the House and Senate by Republicans. In January of 1998 a scandal involving President Clinton and a White House intern shifted the focus of national attention and became almost an obsession for the American press and the establishment during the entire year. The Democratic Party picked up additional seats; though not a majority in the midterm election of 1998—this historic result would lead to the resignation of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and increasing friction within the Republican Party in Congress.⁴⁸

The survey indicated that while public support for an active U.S. role in world affairs remains strong, “overall commitment to engagement coexists with a reluctance to support the use of troops overseas.”⁴⁹ “During a period when the United States has been acting unilaterally in response to some crisis abroad, nearly three quarters (72 percent) of the public preferred that the United States act together with allies, not alone. Only 21 percent of respondents were unilateralist, saying the United States should take action alone.”⁵⁰

“At the top of the list of foreign policy goals, cited as ‘very important’ by 82 percent of the public, was ‘preventing the spread of nuclear weapons’. Close behind came stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the United States (81 percent), protecting the jobs of American workers (80 percent), and combating international terrorism (79 percent).”⁵¹ “Notably absent from the list of first tier and second tier priorities were goals associated with altruistic internationalism, or goals that would primarily benefit others. For example, ‘helping to improve the standard of living in less developed countries’ was seen as ‘very important’ by only 29 percent of the public; it shared the very bottom of the list with ‘helping to bring a democratic form of government’ to other nations.”⁵² Rielly found that “protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression did not do much better (32 percent ‘very important’), nor did the major Clinton administration objective of promoting market economies abroad (34 percent), or promoting and defending human rights in other countries (39 percent). Even the goal of strengthening the United Nations, which has regularly been embraced more warmly by the general public, was called very important by only a moderate 45 percent of the public—down by six points since the post-Gulf War height in 1994.”⁵³

“The clear ranking of more self interested goals at the top of the public’s foreign policy priorities, according to Rielly, supports the thesis that Americans prefer a ‘guarded engagement’. While clearly remaining committed to participating in world affairs, Americans prefer to do so mainly to defend their own interests and alleviate their fears rather than to foster

change around the world.”⁵⁴ “Low support for use of troops even within a multinational context suggests continuing concern for the risks to Americans in foreign intervention. In 1998, none of the potential foreign military conflicts posed in the survey found a majority of support among the public for using U.S. troops.”⁵⁵ One clear exception to public opinion concerning the use of troops abroad had to do with the battle against international terrorists threats. The survey reflected a willingness by the public for the United States to use significant force in this regard—“57 percent of the public approves the use of military ground forces against terrorist training camps, while 74 percent of the public approve of air strikes against terrorist training camps. Strong support for potential military response is still overshadowed however, by a widespread preference for judicial and diplomatic efforts to address these threats.”⁵⁶ “In response to both potential military conflicts and non-traditional threats, preferences for a strong military defense continue to appear in public attitudes. The aim of maintaining superior military power worldwide remains a very important foreign policy goal among the public (59 percent) despite their belief that economic strength is a greater measure power and influence in the world.”⁵⁷

POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO THE ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

The questions posed at the beginning of this paper remain the same—what explains the gap between American public opinion and what Washington actually does? Why has public opinion concerning current U.S. foreign policy not translated into greater political support in Washington and a reduction in U.S. military engagement abroad? Consider the following:

During the Cold War, foreign affairs almost always topped the country’s political agenda. “Gallup regularly found that 10 to 20 percent—and sometimes even more—of those polled named a foreign policy issue the most important problem facing the United States. Today, “most Americans do not see the United States as facing any major international problems. When asked to name the two or three biggest foreign policy problems facing the United States, fully one-fifth (21 percent) of the public do not name a single one.”⁵⁸ When Americans look at the world, they see their country unrivaled as an economic and military superpower. Although the average citizen does perceive some serious threats on the horizon, few see any troubling foreign policy problems at the moment.

“As part of the general population survey, people were asked how interested they were in reports about their local community, national news, news about other countries and news about foreign relations with other countries. In spite of President Clinton’s impeachment battle with Congress and the mid-term congressional elections dominating the news coverage, interest in national news was down 8 percentage points from four years ago. While the proportion of the

public 'very interested' in international news has been on the decline since 1990, the number of those claiming 'hardly interested' has been going up. The 1999 survey results show the percentage of those 'hardly interested' rising three points to 22 percent on interest in news of other countries, and four points to 14 percent on news of U.S. relations with other countries. In a post-Cold War world, with no clear cut 'us vs. them mentality', the relevance of world events appear less evident for many Americans."⁵⁹

"Another measure of public attentiveness to foreign policy issues is the level of 'don't know' responses provided on various questions throughout the survey. 'Don't know' responses among the public are not uncommon, especially for questions on specific foreign policy issues requiring more detailed information. While some might find this troubling, the study showed that the level of 'don't know' responses have remained consistent over time, indicating that the public is no more or less informed today than in the past."⁶⁰

Lester Markel, in 1949, made the following observation concerning the relations between Congress and the Executive Branches in American foreign policy-making. Much of what he observed over 50 years ago still applies today:

"The relations between Congress and the Executive Branches, particularly the Presidency and the State Department—are vital factors in any discussion of public opinion and foreign policy. When these relations are friendly and cordial, the task of informing the public and of framing policy is greatly simplified. But when there are protracted misunderstandings and outright antagonisms, the effect is to confuse the public mind."⁶¹

The framers of our Constitution, "established a system by which foreign affairs were to be conducted principally by the President, but consummated only with the advise and consent of the Senate. Traditionally, the President has led in foreign policy matters"⁶² and the American people, to some extent, expect him to do that. The fact remains however, that "American government is about as badly designed for the conduct of foreign affairs as it could be. In effect it is not one government but two, an executive government at one end of Pennsylvania Avenue, in the White House, and a legislative government at the other end, on Capital Hill. For the most part, any important course of action in the foreign field, or any important act of foreign policy, can only be the product of a negotiated agreement between these two governments, which frequently confront each other in postures of mutual antagonism. Time and again, the United States is simply paralyzed in the foreign field by the inability of the executive and legislative branches to reach agreement."⁶³ "This structural weakness of the American Government is not an accidental weakness, but one deliberately created by the Founding Fathers who knew what they intended when they wrote it into the Constitution. Their overriding objective was to build such weakness into the Constitution of the new state as would prevent its government from ever

imposing a tyranny on the people.”⁶⁴ “The founders gave Congress the power to declare war for good reason. They wanted the decision to move from peace to war—to put lives and fortune at risk—to be made carefully, with deliberation, not with dispatch. James Wilson, with James Madison, the preeminent constitutional thinkers of the founders, wrote that the constitutional provision ‘will not hurry us into war. It is calculated to guard against it. It will not be in the power of a single man, or a single body of men, to involve us in such distress’”.⁶⁵ The 1970’s and the aftermath of the Vietnam disaster re-awakened Congress to their connection with the American public and their responsibility to be ever vigilant in limiting the powers of the President in the conduct of foreign affairs.

Today it appears that with no major threat to U.S. national security on the horizon and with public interest waning, the costs to Congress in challenging the president have again plummeted. An article appearing in the Los Angeles Times reads as follows: “On April 1998, during the Kosovo war, a majority of the House of Representatives voted against a declaration of war; against withdrawal from the war, for requiring congressional approval prior to the dispatch of any ground forces; and in a 213-213 vote, against a resolution in support of the air war. House leaders then proceeded to work towards giving the Pentagon twice as much money as it had asked for to pay for the war. The Senate effort was bipartisan but not much better. Leaders of both parties agreed to token debate before tabling a resolution that would authorize ground forces. So the bombing proceeded—without the sanction of Congress—against its expressed will,”⁶⁶ and with its expressed financial support.

The relations between Congress and the Executive Branches of government are critical to the formulation of foreign policy and the voice of America in that process. “There must be a two way flow of information between the executive and legislative branches. The State Department should give to Congress, as fully as possible, information that the members of Congress in turn, would pass on to their constituents. The Department should then receive from the Congress some indication of what the nation is thinking.”⁶⁷ “Poor relations, however, cuts off this two-way flow of information and policy becomes mired in partisan politics and personal animosities. Often the citizen is asked to choose between two diametrically opposed views of policy—one the Executive’s and one the Congress’. Finally, and most important, poor relations deprive the Executive and the State Department of the kind of Congressional support they need and will increasingly need in the future.”⁶⁸

It may be appropriate to note at this point that *The 21st Century Road Map For National Security: Imperative for Change-Phase III Report* of the U.S. Commission on National Security

has recommended substantial changes in Executive Branch institutions—"change" which in their opinion "is needed if America is to retain its ability to lead the world and to assure the nation's safety. According to the commission, the legislative Branch must change as well:

"It is one thing to appeal to Congress to reform the State Department or the Defense Department, quite another to call upon Congress to reform itself. Over the years since World War II, the Legislative Branch has been reformed and modernized much less than the Executive Branch. Indeed, the very nature of power in Congress makes it difficult for legislators to reform their collective institutions. Yet American national security in the 21st Century, and the prominent role of daily global involvement that is the nature of American life in our generation, mandates a serious reappraisal of both the individual and collective efforts of Congress and its members. Such a reappraisal must begin with a shared understanding of the Legislative Branch's role in the development and assessment of post-Cold War foreign policy. Divided Constitutional responsibilities require the Executive and Legislature to work together in order for U.S. foreign policy to have coherence. Yet the Executive Branch has at times informed rather than consulted Congress. It has often treated Congress as an obstacle rather than a partner, seeking Congressional input mostly in times of crisis rather than in an ongoing way that would yield support when crises occur. For its part, Congress has not always taken full responsibility for educating its members on foreign policy issues...and has sustained a structure that undermines rather than strengthens its ability to fulfill its Constitutional obligations in the foreign policy arena...Effective education of members will ensure a more knowledgeable debate...and allow members to become more effective educators of their constituencies about the importance of national security matters...The war-gaming center at the National Defense University should be expanded so that virtually every member of Congress can participate in one or more war games per two year cycle...to acquire a better understanding of the limits of American power, and of the reality that any action the United States takes, invariably has multiple permeations abroad." ⁶⁹

WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN?

The one way to prevent people from having an erroneous opinion is to furnish the whole people, as part of their ordinary education, with current information about their relations to other people, about the limitations upon their own rights, about their duties to respect the rights of others, about what has happened and is happening in international affairs, and about the effects upon national life of the things that are done or refused as between nations; so that the people themselves will have the means to test the misinformation and appeals to prejudice and passion based upon error.

—Elihu Root ⁷⁰

"While there is more than likely disagreement as to the extent and degree to which foreign policy decisions are affected by public opinion, a trend of thought has emerged that public opinion—for better or for worse—influences foreign policy and national security decisions. In

fact, John H. Sigler has written, "The basic dilemma facing any American president in the foreign policy arena today is the need for an active policy which can be made acceptable...to the American public".⁷¹ Although the influence of public opinion may not always be immediately apparent to the observer, American democracy has preserved its fundamental place. This continues to be especially true with regard to the third dimension of public opinion involving international affairs: the use or non-use of military force as an instrument of power in U.S. foreign policy. Throughout our history, the impact of war or military intervention on American public opinion has been significant. "World War II and the Vietnam conflict were periods of changing international systems, and Americans' fundamental attitudes underwent readjustment as a result of these wars and the new systems that emerged."⁷² According to Ronald J. Hinckley, "Following the Vietnam War, the false consensus in national security affairs unraveled, but American attitudes towards war are so sensitive that this could have happened much earlier—within the decade after the end of World War II, as a result of the Korean War.⁷³ John Mueller, who analyzed public opinion during both the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts, found:

"The situation with regard to data from Korea and Vietnam is rather extraordinary. As observed...the amount of vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam was vastly greater than that for the war in Korea. Yet it has now been found that *support for the wars among the general public followed a pattern of decline that was remarkably similar*. Although support for the war in Vietnam did finally drop below those levels found during Korea, it did so only after the war had gone on considerably longer and only after American casualties had far surpassed those of the earlier war. [Emphasis added]"⁷⁴

Mueller believes that had the Korean War gone on longer or had it been fought differently, it could have broken the public opinion consensus that was thought to exist in the post-World War II era. "American policy makers appeared to have been aware of this possibility. Stephen T. Homer added to Mueller's findings the fact that U.S. leaders in the Korean conflict shifted strategies to reduce casualties. General Mathew B. Ridgeway 'went over to active defense in November 1951, eschewing any further major ground offenses in the war' to avoid any unnecessary loss of his own men, which would increase opposition to the war at home."⁷⁵ Hinckley also points out that this form of strategy was also followed in the Vietnam conflict. "President Lyndon B. Johnson decided not to call up the reserves after the Tet Offensive because, among other things 'domestic public opinion continued to be discouraged' and his advisors 'expressed concern about the [public opinion] division in our country. The fact of the matter is that in democracies, protracted military intervention cannot be maintained without substantial public opinion support.'⁷⁶ President Clinton may have preempted domestic public

opinion concerning U.S. military engagement in Bosnia and Kosovo by mobilizing National Guard personnel as derivative units under Presidential Reserve Call-up as opposed to the traditional method of full-unit mobilization.

The extent to which public opinion influences foreign policy depends on three critical factors: the intensity with which the opinions are held, the degree to which obstacles exist to block the flow of public opinion to government decisions-makers, and most importantly, the level of knowledge that both the public and Congress have concerning the issues. Each citizen individually must play their part and equip themselves for citizenship. An apathetic and ill informed public contributes to an inattentive Congress. A decrease in Congressional deference to the president can only occur when the public is engaged. "The key to fighting apathetic internationalism on the part of the public is to persuade the public to act on its internationalist preferences. If politicians believe they will be rewarded for defending broad interests of the American people and penalized for tending to narrow one, they will pay more heed to foreign policy."⁷⁷

"Congress must recognize it's duty to lead public opinion in our country. This duty has not been recognized in the past, and is not recognized today. On the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence to show that Congress is behind, not ahead, of public opinion on most matters of major policy. But quite apart from considerations of self preservation, most members honestly believe that their proper function is to be guided by public opinions that already exists among their constituency, rather than informing it into new paths. Many take this attitude because, being realists, they recognize their own limitations. They believe that only a few individuals of exceptional character and ability, whose constituents are tolerant and enlightened, can work at molding public opinion. For measurable progress in this direction, we shall have to have a greater proportion of Representatives and Senators with qualities of true statesmanship."⁷⁸

Today more than ever, Congress must be vigilant to oversee and if necessary limit the powers of the President in the conduct of foreign affairs.

"This however, overlooks the basic principle of all government, which is that the power to do right inevitably includes the power to do wrong. If a general on the battle field has the power to make the right decisions—and he must have such power—than he also has the power to make the wrong decisions. To the extent that the Congress takes away the President's power to do wrong it takes away his power to do right. And the Congress itself, cannot assume the role of the general on the battlefield. It cannot itself conduct the foreign relations of the United States, especially where rapid and decisive action is required. It can only prevent the President from doing so—or at least, impede him dangerously."⁷⁹

Louis J. Halle said "The only solution I know is for the American people always to elect, as their President, a Pericles or a Washington—someone who can be entrusted with the power

to do wrong that is inseparable from the power to do right.”⁸⁰ “Power can and often does corrupt—but power chastened by a sense of duty and a recognition of its limits can ennoble.”⁸¹ Alexis De Tocqueville in the mid-1830’s remarked: “‘great democratic nations must have a mission larger than its own safety and prosperity’, but even he warned against crusading zeal. Most Americans today reject both crusaders and isolationists and support principled policies rooted in our national interests and a decent respect for the rights of others.”⁸² The domestic task at hand is then to give the American people the facts and reasons behind our foreign policy so that they will understand it and presumably support it. With “enlightened” communication between the public and their elected representatives, there is good reason to believe the policies that emerge will be the better for it.

WORD COUNT = 7,555

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